

DUKE UNIVERSITY COMMONWEALTH-STUDIES CENTER PUBLICATION 29 . . .

RICHARD A. PRESTON'S

CANADA AND "IMPERIAL DEFENSE"

A Study of the Origins of the British Commonwealth's Defense Organization, 1867-1919

The long-standing need to explode the myth of "imperial defense" is at last answered by Dr. Preston's important reinterpretation of the evolution of British Empire and Commonwealth defense co-operation. The author's use of primary sources in the dominions for information regarding individual dominion military histories outdates previous historians who used mainly British sources. This different orientation produces forcefully different results, for it redefines the origin and real meaning of "imperial defense" by showing the Commonwealth military system to be, not a vestige of the earlier Empire system, but a result of the natural aspirations and needs of the colonies themselves.

After discussion of early colonial defense, effected principally by British naval power, and after description of the gradual co-ordination of a so-called imperial army emerging from strong trends in the dominions operating prior to World War I, Dr. Preston explains the vital importance of the colonies in the success of Commonwealth war efforts. His study seeks the origins of British Commonwealth relationships in the history of dominion, and especially of Canadian, military and naval developments.

Beginning from a colonial view of these developments within the individual dominions rather than from the standard emphasis on imperial defense planning, the author implements his research by an extensive use of defense files in dominion military archives — material heretofore frequently ignored. A new look at colonial roles in the replacement of shadowy imperial organization by effective voluntary naval and military co-operation is taken by means of a thorough examination of the positive Canadian influence on the defensive system of the British Empire and Commonwealth. Because of the importance of the Australasian colonies' contributions to imperial naval defense, Canada's peculiar strategic problem forced her into a role that was out of sympathy with British imperial de-

fense proposals. Canada's pilot role in rejection of an enforced, centralized military establishment led to the voluntary setting up of uniform training, weapons, and organization systems and welded Commonwealth armies and navies into a strong unity of effort that proved repeatedly successful in wartime. The resulting exploitation of national sentiment in the dominions proved more cohesive and longer-lasting than other imperial ties.

This unbeatable system of defense co-operation based on standardized organization and training, and operating to the satisfaction of the nationally minded dominions, is an invaluable example to the United Nations in its work to unify the war effort of free states. Today the Commonwealth military relationship is threatened by internal political disruption. Its traditions and past successes are, nevertheless, pertinent and vital to the free world. Dr. Preston's research, study, and cogent presentation of the origins of one of the most startlingly effective military alliances in history thus has immense topical value for the interested amateur as well as for the professional student of Canada, of Britain, and of military history.

Richard A. Preston, currently W. K. Boyd Professor of History at Duke University, has held posts at the University College of South Wales, the University of Toronto, and the Royal Military College of Canada. He served as president of the Canadian Historical Association (1960-61) and has published numerous articles in American, Canadian, and foreign journals. Dr. Preston is the author of several books, including *Gorges of Plymouth Fort: A Life of Sir Ferdinando Gorges* (University of Toronto Press); and *Men in Arms: A History of Warfare and Its Interrelationships with Western Society* (in collaboration).

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